

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of the proposed project, the Main Airfield Parcel Record of Decision/Remedial Action Plan (ROD/RAP) for Hamilton Army Airfield (HAAF), and this environmental impact report (EIR). Background information on HAAF and the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project (HWRP) is provided as well as a description of the EIR, including the intent and scope of the EIR, the environmental impact review requirements that must be met prior to project approval, and the EIR organization.

## Project Overview

The ROD/RAP presents the actions to be taken at the former HAAF main airfield parcel and in the adjacent coastal salt marsh area to address residual contamination, pursuant to the ultimate use of the site for wetland restoration. The California Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy), as the local lead agency for wetland restoration at the site, is preparing this subsequent EIR pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The SEIR evaluates the potential environmental effects of activities in the ROD/RAP and identify measures to minimize or avoid any environmental effects determined to be potentially significant. Approval of the ROD/RAP by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) (collectively referred to as the State) is a discretionary action subject to CEQA.

Wetland restoration of the main airfield parcel is proposed as part of the HWRP, which was evaluated in a final environmental impact report/environmental impact statement (EIR/EIS) that was certified in December 1998. Although it was assumed that residual contamination would be addressed at the site before implementation of the HWRP, details of the nature and extent of residual contamination and the appropriate actions necessary to address it were not known in 1998 when the HWRP EIR/EIS was completed. This subsequent EIR has therefore been prepared to evaluate the potential for environmental impacts from the actions proposed in the ROD/RAP.

## Background

### Site Background

HAAF was constructed on reclaimed tidal wetland by the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1932. Before 1932, the area was known as Marin Meadows and had been used as ranch and farmland since the Mexican Land Grant (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers undated). Military operations began in December 1932. Bombers, transport, and fighter aircraft were based at the airfield. HAAF played a major role in World War II as a training field and staging area for Pacific Theater operations. The airfield was renamed Hamilton Air Force Base in 1947, when it was transferred to the newly created U.S. Air Force.

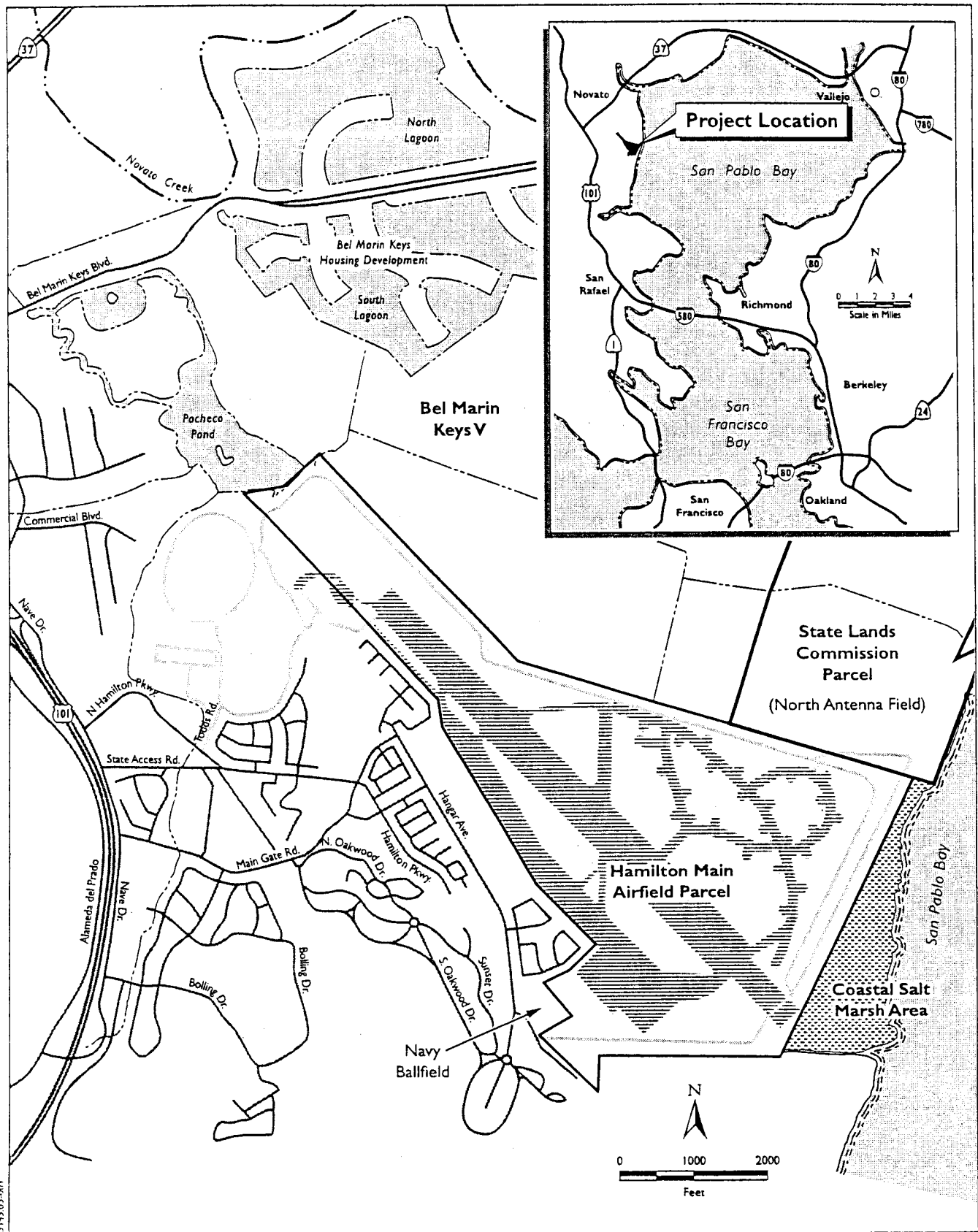
In the mid-1960s, the U.S. Air Force began to curtail base operations because of increased complaints about aircraft noise and concerns for air traffic and public safety (Earth Technology Corporation 1994). In 1974, the U.S. Air Force deactivated the base and initiated transfer of the property to other military or government agencies. In the transfer process, the residential portion of the installation, along with support facilities, was transferred to the U.S. Navy in 1975. Custodial management of other areas was assumed by the General Services Administration (GSA).

In 1976, the Army was given permission to use the runway and ancillary facilities and several other buildings for regular Army and Army Reserve operations. A parcel in the hangar area went to the U.S. Coast Guard in 1983. The Army continued to use portions of HAAF on a permit basis until 1984, when portions of the airfield were officially acquired by the Army and property management responsibilities were transferred to the Presidio of San Francisco. Aircraft operations were again discontinued in 1994 when the base was closed.

### Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project Background

The Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1988 (BRAC) mandated closure of HAAF. Disposal and a variety of reuse options were considered in the HAAF Disposal and Reuse EIS. In 1998, the Conservancy developed a feasibility analysis and conceptual plan for wetland restoration on the main airfield parcel and the adjacent State Lands Commission (SLC) antenna field parcel. The Army anticipates transferring approximately 630 acres of the HAAF Main Airfield parcel to the Conservancy to become part of the HWRP.

The HWRP, as currently authorized, would involve restoration on approximately 950 acres of habitat and create 570 acres of new tidal wetlands on HAAF and on the Navy ball fields parcel and the SLC parcel (also known as the North Antenna Field), which is owned by the State of California and administered by the SLC (Figure 1-1). The HWRP may also be expanded to include wetland restoration on the adjacent Bel Marin Keys V (BMKV) property.



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Figure I-1  
Hamilton ROD/RAP Project Area

A conceptual plan for the HWRP is shown in Figure 1-2. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers San Francisco District would construct the HWRP and would monitor and adaptively manage it for 13 years. The Conservancy, as the local sponsor, would be responsible for operation and maintenance of the HWRP from project completion forward. The Army anticipates transferring 630 acres of the 644-acre HAAF main airfield parcel to the Conservancy to become part of the HWRP. (The remaining 14 acres is located under the New Hamilton Partners' levee and this property would probably be transferred to the City of Novato.)

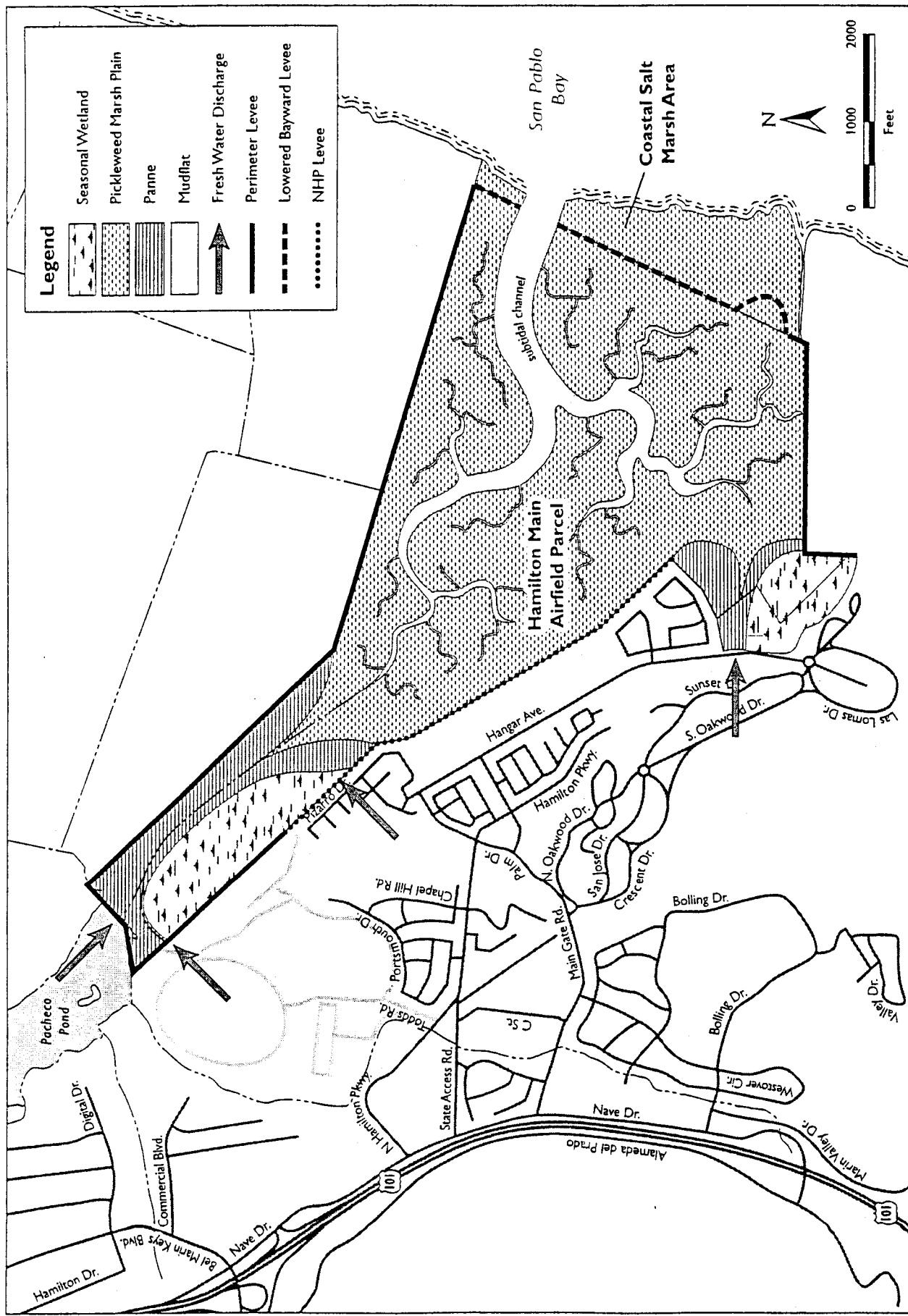
An EIS/EIR was completed for the HWRP in 1998, and the HWRP was authorized under the Water Resources Development Act of 1999. A supplemental EIS/EIR was completed in 2003 for wetland restoration on the BMKV portion of the HWRP. Ongoing investigations and interim removal actions have been conducted by the Army to make the property suitable for transfer and reuse. The ROD/RAP evaluated in this SEIR has been developed to identify the additional environmental actions necessary to protect public health and the environment based on the proposed future use of the property for wetland habitat.

The Navy ball fields parcel, located on the southwest corner of the Main Airfield Parcel (Figure 1-1), is included in the HWRP project area. However, this parcel is under Navy ownership and will be subject to a separate transfer process. With the exception of Spoils Pile N, any residual contamination issues on this parcel will be addressed by the Navy. Remediation of Spoils Pile N pursuant to the planned wetland use of the Navy ball fields parcel is addressed in the ROD/RAP.

## Intent and Scope of the Document

### Intent

CEQA requires state and local agencies to estimate and evaluate the environmental implications of their actions. It aims to prevent adverse environmental impacts of those actions by requiring agencies to avoid or reduce significant environmental impacts when feasible. CEQA requires that the lead agency prepare an EIR when the lead agency determines that a project may have a significant effect on the environment.



**Figure 1-2  
Conceptual Restoration Plan – Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project**

According to CEQA Guideline 15162, a subsequent EIR must be prepared if the agency with continuing discretionary authority over the project determines on the basis of substantial evidence in light of the whole record that

- substantial changes proposed in the project will require major revisions to the previous EIR because of the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified effects,
- substantial changes occur with respect to the circumstances under which the project is undertaken that will require major revision of a previous EIR because of the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified effects, or
- new information of substantial importance that was not known or could not have been known without exercise of reasonable diligence at the time the previous EIR was certified, shows the project may have a significant impact not addressed in the previous EIR.

When the 1998 EIS/EIR for the HWRP was prepared, details of remedial solutions for residual contamination on the site were unavailable. It was assumed in the HWRP EIR/EIS that any known contamination at the site would be remediated, pursuant to all regulatory controls and to cleanup standards that would support future use, before implementation of the wetland restoration project. Since completion of the HWRP EIR/EIS, hazardous materials contamination at the site has been further evaluated and remedial options have been developed. The activities described in the ROD/RAP constitute new information that was previously unknown and warrant preparation of a subsequent EIR. A subsequent EIR is subject to the same notice and public review requirements as the original EIR and must state where the previous document is available for review (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15162[c]).

DTSC and RWQCB approval of the ROD/RAP is considered a discretionary action subject to CEQA. The RWQCB will also be adopting site cleanup requirements (SCRs) for implementation of the ROD/RAP, which is a discretionary action subject to CEQA. Army approval of the ROD/RAP is a federal action that is not subject to CEQA.

This subsequent EIR is being prepared to comply with the requirements of CEQA with the intent to

- identify potential direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts associated with implementation of the proposed RAP;
- describe mitigation measures intended to avoid potentially significant impacts or reduce them to a less-than-significant level; and
- disclose potential impacts and proposed mitigation measures for public review and comment.

## Scope

This document is a subsequent EIR to the 1998 HWRP EIR/EIS (Conservancy 1998), which is incorporated by reference. The 1998 EIR/EIS evaluated impacts associated with the overall wetland restoration project. This subsequent EIR is being prepared to address potential impacts that may occur from the cleanup activities associated with residual contamination, pursuant to the larger wetland restoration project.

This subsequent EIR describes the proposed ROD/RAP, the No-Project Alternative, and other alternative remedial actions considered. As required by CEQA, the subsequent EIR evaluates the potential impacts of the ROD/RAP for the following resource topics:

- geology, soils, and seismicity;
- water resources;
- public health;
- biological resources;
- land use and public utilities;
- hazardous substances and waste;
- transportation;
- air quality;
- noise; and
- cultural resources.

The subsequent EIR also analyzes

- significant unavoidable impacts,
- significant irreversible changes in the environment,
- growth inducement,
- cumulative impacts, and
- alternatives to the proposed project.

## Environmental Review Process

### Public Involvement and Scoping

One of the purposes of CEQA is to establish opportunities for the public to review and comment on projects that may affect the environment. CEQA provides public participation through

- publication of the Notice of Preparation (NOP),
- project scoping,
- public review of environmental documents, and
- public hearing(s).

## Notice of Preparation

The purpose of the NOP is to solicit participation from responsible and coordinating federal, state, and local agencies and from the public in determining the scope of an EIR. The scoping process was formally initiated for this subsequent EIR on April 11, 2003, by submitting the NOP to the California State Clearinghouse in compliance with CEQA. The NOP was also distributed to interested agencies, organizations, and members of the public.

## Project Scoping

Scoping refers to the process used to determine the focus and content of an EIR. Scoping solicits input on the potential topics to be addressed in an EIR, the range of project alternatives, and possible mitigation measures. Scoping is also helpful in establishing methods of assessment and in selecting the environmental effects to be considered in detail. Tools used in scoping of this EIR included informal stakeholder and interagency consultation, a public scoping meeting, and publication of the project NOP.

A public scoping meeting was held on May 1, 2003, at the Marin Humane Society in Novato, California. The scoping meeting provided an opportunity for attendees to comment on environmental issues of concern and the alternatives that should be discussed in the EIR. One person attended the scoping meeting. Comments provided at the meeting addressed several questions relevant to the EIR, including why a subsequent EIR was being prepared and whether other land use alternatives were under consideration. Several questions regarding contamination, past sampling, and future monitoring of the site, which were applicable to the ROD/RAP, were also presented. No written comments were received during the scoping period.

## Document Organization

Following this introduction, Chapter 2, "Description of Proposed Project," describes the proposed project in detail, including overall goals and objectives, site background, and the process of evaluation leading to selection of remedial strategies for each site. Chapter 3, "Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures," discusses various resources affected by the proposed project. Chapter 4, "Alternatives" discusses alternatives to the proposed



ROD/RAP that were considered. Chapter 5, "Other Required CEQA Analyses," provides a discussion of cumulative impacts, growth-inducing impacts, and significant irreversible environmental changes. Chapter 6, "List of Preparers," provides a list of preparers and contributors of the EIR. Chapter 7 presents references cited.